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ABSTRACT

When two long-established institutions attempt a cooperative program, there can be several different kinds of conflicts. A current trend is to arrange cooperative projects between school systems and the teacher preparation component of a college or university. One such project, an inner-city student teaching program is reviewed in this paper. First, the structure and history of the program are discussed. Then, two sections examine the organization and institutional conflicts (persons-in-positions, person-shuffling, spheres of influence, implicit vs. explicit policy, and financial conflicts), and climate and expectation conflicts (personal defensiveness, competition and rivalry, racial attitudes, and student attitudes). An overall theme of this paper is the "person-in-a-position", i.e., the conflicts which arise, or are avoided, as the result of the specific person who occupies a specific position. (Author/AM)

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The University and the School System: A Case Study[1]

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[1]Revision of a Paper Presented at the Second National Conference on Urban Education, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 22, 1976.

The State of Ohio, as with many other states, is in the midst of a reexamination of teacher education practices and policies. One of the new mandates calls for increased cooperation between public school systems and teacher education institutions. What conflicts are encountered when two long-standing, highly structured institutions attempt a joint venture? These programs are quite properly subjected to formal evaluation procedures; but this is an analysis from a personal, and admittedly subjective, point-of-view of what happened during the life and times of one program. The first section reviews the structure and history of "The Program", the second section discusses organizational and institutional conflicts, and the third section discusses conflicts of psychological climate and expectations.

I. STRUCTURE AND HISTORY

A few years ago the Education Division of a medium-sized state university (hereafter, "University") decided to implement a program for the training of urban teachers in cooperation with the public schools (hereafter, "School System") in a large, nearby city. This Program was initiated by the Dean of the Division and the chairperson of my department, which assumed administrative responsibility.

A similar program operating in a different city was being abandoned from a combination of personnel and logistical problems. The city was too far away, and the director had been so heavily involved in the "student revolution" that he was *persona non grata*. I was selected as the Director of the new program because I had once mentioned to the department chairperson that I was interested in the problems of cities and because I was not doing anything important with my time. I started with some awareness of urban problems, some sense of institutional politics, little conscious racism, and little knowledge of

cultural differences.

The new Program operated for five years until cancelled by the University due to lack of funds (see II.5) and lack of student interest (see III.4). During the Program's existence, the yearly number of participants ranged between 16 and 32. Each year's participants engaged in a full-time, five-day workshop on urban problems which also involved direct exposure to the neighborhoods in which they would student teach. During their term of student teaching, the University Supervisor was a teacher in a school in the area who was easily available for consultation and support. The participants were encouraged to live in low-cost, integrated housing in the area of the schools, and almost all of them did so.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICTS

The fact that two institutional systems were attempting to support a joint venture meant a clash between them in terms of structures, policies, and practices. The conflicts which became important did not necessarily begin that way, and another observer or participant would surely give another interpretation of some events.

(1) Persons-in-positions. In institutions there are individuals who occupy specific jobs with designated responsibilities. When operating a program, it is not possible to fully separate individuals from their jobs; the two exist in a transactional state as an inseparable entity, a "person-in-a-position". Sometimes it is the person aspect of the entity who brings about conflict; sometimes the position aspect; but neither is ever entirely separable from the other. (Some person-centered conflicts are addressed in Section III.) A person-in-a-position is never neutral; if the person does not facilitate the program (as a function of that position), then that person becomes a hindrance

because time and energy will be spent searching for alternate means of accomplishing the goals.

One example of this non-neutrality principle involves the willingness of the person-in-a-position to assume responsibility for a decision which needs to be made. A decision which might meet with disapproval from another person-in-a-position will mean a certain degree of risk to the decision-maker. If the person-in-a-position who is to make the decision is operating from a defensive, or fear of failure, base, then the decision will be postponed or avoided and no action can be taken. One of the School System principals would utilize the defensive maneuver of always letting a central office administrator make the decision. This brought about conflict because these decisions were therefore being made on criteria other than those which would be of direct benefit to the operation of the Program. This became a "sphere-of-influence" conflict situation (see II.3) because of this person-in-this position.

Another form in which the person-in-a-position conflict emerges is when no specific policy covers the situation or problem. The person-in-the decision-making-position can either facilitiate or hinder solution of the problem. If he or she insists, for example, that since there is no policy to cover it, nothing can be done, then the problem remains unsolved. Alternatively, a solution can be arranged either as an exception to normal policy, or by recourse to other policies which are not usually applied. An example of the latter occurred when the Program wished to grant academic credit to the participants for a workshop experience which took place just before the regular fall academic term. Instead of telling us that the workshop could not be granted credit during a "non-term", the registrar arranged to have it listed during the next regular term. On the negative side was our attempt to arrange for the on-site housing through the University financial offices so

that when new student teachers went into the area each quarter they would not have to make their own short-term arrangements. Since no policy existed to cover this situation, we were told by the person-in-the-position that it could not be done; and we had to make arrangements outside the ordinary channels of the University.

(2) Person shuffling. The School System operates on a reward system in which the junior high schools (one of which was important to our Program) are stepping stones for high school administrators going either up or down the status ladder. Also, motivated and talented teachers enter the administrative track (where the money is) through an internship program, then move into the mainstream administrative track. This operates at all grade levels. The end result is a constant turnover of administrative personnel which meant lack of continuity and difficulties of communication. Since the person-aspect of the person-in-a-position entity kept changing, new decisions would have to be made and old implicit agreements renegotiated. At the focal junior high school of the Program, there were three different principals within four academic years.

Another person-shuffling conflict arose because of the transfer of teachers from mostly-white to mostly-black schools in order to "integrate" the teaching staff and forestall pupil integration. Since there were few volunteers to move into the mostly-black schools, transfers were mandatory which resulted in teachers who had negative attitudes toward urban schooling. The conflict became intense if a building principal insisted that such a teacher be a Master Teacher for one of the student teachers.

At the University person-in-positions were more stable with one notable exception. During its five-year existence, there were three different persons serving as overall Directors of Student Teaching and five different secretaries handling the administrative paperwork. Conflicts caused by missed and missing

communication were numerous.

(3) Spheres of influence. Within each institution there are competing spheres of influence which affect program operation and bring about conflict. Responsibility for specific activities or decisions is often properly shared by several person-in-positions. For example, in both the University and in the School System there are overlapping spheres of influence with regard to student teachers in specialized fields such as home economics, music, or industrial education. Both institutions had separate departmental persons responsible for those areas as well as regular channels for non-specialized teaching areas. In the School System, a decision made with the agreement of the building principal was often disputed by the specialized curriculum supervisor; and conflict arose in central administrative offices because it was not possible to clear all decisions with all person-in-positions who felt the decision to be within their sphere of influence. And at the University, a specific student teacher placement made by the Program Director was negated by a specialized supervisor from another department, partially because of a desire to protect the personal power and authority of that-person-in-a-position.

(4) Implict vs. explicit policy. Institutions often state one policy and then effectively maneuver to contradict that policy; that is, they operate hypocritically with contradiction between stated and actual policy. The School System had a stated policy of encouraging the autonomy and independence of neighborhood schools, and then acted contradictorily by having central administration persons-in-positions object to every departure from "standard operating procedure". The actual operating policy was that deviations from previous practices were not well tolerated; a conflict producing situation when our Program was involved because our goal was to maximize the student teaching experience with regard to urban education problems, rather than wishing

to maximize rule-following behaviors. This type of confict also existed at the University because it was stated policy to encourage any programmatic involvement in urban affairs, but many informal practices made it difficult to see how support was being given. The lack of support in general from faculty and administrators effectively contradicted stated policy; many faculty did not encourage students to participate in urban experiences, and some actively discouraged such participation, citing myths about violence and lack of "opportunity to teach" as their reasons.

(5) Financial conflicts. Too much competition for too few dollars makes for conflict. At the University, central adminstration began searching for ways to eliminate dollar-flow into the Education Division as a result of the decrease in education students. Persons-in-financial-positions make decisions on the basis of financial criteria, and this brings conflict with persons-in-program-positions who make decisions on the basis of programmatic criteria. In this case, the financial criteria were stronger. This conflict within the University budget itself was compounded by a conflict between the Divisional Dean and the chief administrative officer of the University, which effectively prevented the program-oriented persons from arguing their case before persons-in-important-positions.

III. CLIMATE AND EXPECTATION CONFLICTS

Institutional systems are composed of persons who have attitudes, who have general expectations of behavior, and who apply labels and values to things, events, processes, and to other persons. These attitudes become generalized into a climate which affects program operation, especially if the program introduces events or persons which are contrary to the general climate.

(1) Personal defensiveness. Within an institutional context, those

individuals who perceive their job, power, or status as being threatened will often become defensive and try to maneuver so as to block or escape the perceived threat. This is a different situation than the conflict of competing spheres of influence described in II.3 because it involves emotional and personal opposition to program implementation, rather than mere disagreement. One conflict arose when a central administrator in the School System tried to place some participants in schools outside the area of the Program because she felt her power over student teaching arrangements to be threatened and accepted the alternative of "fight" rather than that of "cooperate".

(2) Competition and rivalry. A climate of competition and rivalry existed between the School System and the University. The School System has a high proportion of teachers and administrators from a local city university. Many of them have retained the negative attitudes toward our University which they had developed during their undergraduate experience. This was not always a serious conflict, but it did hamper interpersonal relationships to some extent. In addition, many School System persons perceived our University as being quite wealthy and therefore a good source of monetary compensation. It was nearly impossible to convince School System personnel that the University did not have copious amounts of money to spread around. One conflict came about when a secondary school asked for compensation for each of its administrators as a condition for participation in the Program.

(3) Racial attitudes. At the University some faculty exhibited racism toward blacks and a tendency to regard the problem of urban education as essentially unsolvable and/or irrelevant. It was not so much a matter of overt racism as of covert attitudes. It was difficult to find any faculty who were truly interested in urban education, who even were willing to send

students to the inner-city for observation experiences. In the School System there was some reverse-racism, an attitude exhibited by some black educators that the Program could not be successful because the University personnel all were white and therefore could not be expected to understand, nor find solutions for, the problems of urban education.

(4) Student attitudes. During the late 1960's, college students were oriented toward political action and toward attempts to rectify social problems. In the 1970's attitudes of entering students had become more self-centered as young people began feeling the recession and its consequent rise of unemployment. It was no longer fashionable to engage in political protest or activity; instead, studying and partying became the dominant activities. This created a conflict between the Program and its immediate clientele, the University students. In its last year of existence, only 16 student-teachers participated, and the necessary effort and expense could no longer be justified. The Program ended.

CONCLUSION

The Program encountered many conflicts during its existence; some of them were serious, some not; some could have been avoided, some not. During the planning stage, an attempt had been made to minimize conflicts by establishing a core administrative group of persons who could function cooperatively and effectively. But changes in the persons-in-these-positions resulted in a loss of cooperation and effectiveness. The openess and willingness to resolve the conflicts as they arose began to disappear. Some conflicts are inevitable when two institutions attempt a cooperative program.

One solution would be to build a mechanism into the structure of the program which would recognize this inevitability and provide for methods of

resolving those conflicts. But, unfortunately, the very act of creating such mechanisms brings about the types of conflicts which prevent the effective implementation of the mechanism. My experience was that joint ventures can operate successfully only if the persons-in-the-important-positions desire to cooperate and constructively search for solutions to problems and resolution of conflicts.